

Introductions and Conclusions

It is pretty much impossible to draft a perfect introduction, thesis statement, or conclusion on your first try. Leave time to write, revise, and edit, and you will create effective writing. It is also a good idea to get feedback from others; then you can be sure that your message and tone are clear.

Introductions

An introduction is your only chance to make a good first impression on your reader, so it's very important to spend time drafting an effective one. It should identify what your paper will be about and grab the reader's attention. It may also include your thesis statement (see below).

Your introduction should

- Focus the reader's attention on your subject and arouse curiosity
- Specify your topic
- Provide your thesis statement
- Be concise

Be aware that you do not have to draft the introduction first; that can actually make it more difficult. Many writers draft the introduction last to ensure that it reflects the content of the paper.

Getting started:

Here are some suggestions for effective introductions from *The Handbook for Writers*, p. 75. You can find similar and additional advice in *The Little, Brown Handbook*, pp. 102-106.

Good Strategies	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide background• Ask a question• Relate an interesting story• Use a vivid quotation• Offer a surprising statistic• Outline a problem or dilemma• Define a word central to your subject• Start with a general point and get more specific• Challenge a commonly held idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Purpose statements: "My paper will . . ."• Apologies• Clichés: "a day late and a dollar short," "Waste not, want not."• Disregarding your instructor's preferences (use of questions, first and second person, tone, etc.)• Extremes (too long or too short)• An intro that does not match your paper

Thesis Statements

Your thesis statement states "the central, controlling idea of an essay and perhaps previews the essay's organization" (*The Little, Brown Handbook* 903). Also see *LBH* 28-31.

Basic requirements for a thesis statement:

- It states the essay's subject—the topic you want to discuss.
- It indicates the essay's purpose—either informative or persuasive.
- It expresses your point of view on the topic.
- It uses specific language—not vague words.
- It may briefly state the major subdivisions of the topic. (*Handbook for Writers* 36)

Begin with the central question you want to answer about your topic. Answer that question in a sentence. For example:

Question: Do violent lyrics cause teenagers to commit violent acts?

Answer: Research shows that most violence in teenagers is caused by situations at home or mental/emotional disorders.

Thesis statement: While many people believe that violent lyrics cause teenagers to act out, research proves that violence is caused by living conditions or emotional disorders.

Conclusions

A conclusion completes an essay and assures that readers have understood your purpose and ideas. A strong conclusion commonly restates your thesis in different words or from a fresh viewpoint. An effective conclusion will often echo the introduction, but will use a different strategy.

Getting Started:

Here are some suggestions for effective conclusions from *The Handbook for Writers*, p. 103. You can find similar and additional advice in *The Little, Brown Handbook*, pp. 102-106.

Good Strategies	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summarize your essay's main points• A statement that urges awareness or action• A statement that looks to the future or implications of the topic• Relate or finish an interesting story• Ask a thought-provoking question• Use a quotation to sum up the thesis• Offer a surprising concluding statistic• Outline a problem or dilemma• Redefine a key term• Make a recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Announcing statements: "My paper has proven that . . ."• Repeating the introduction• Clichés: "a day late and a dollar short," "Waste not, want not."• Disregarding your instructor's preferences (use of questions, first and second person, tone, etc.)• New ideas that were not covered in the paper• Absolutes and sweeping generalizations• Fallacies (flaws in logic)• Apologies

Essay Titles

A good title helps you stay focused while drafting and also tells your reader what to expect. Work to make a title both interesting and informative. Think: creative title + informative subtitle (" 'Jive'n and Survivin': The Poetry of Langston Hughes," for example) Don't write a title at the last minute—it will be obvious that you did not take time to think about what your essay is saying. Write key words and ideas from the essay for brainstorming and then turn those into titles. Try to draft several and then choose the best one.

- Give readers a sense of **your** argument rather than announcing a vague topic or merely writing "Essay 2" or not bothering to create a title at all (Graff and Birkinstein, *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* 128).
- Decide whether you want a direct title (clearly states topic of essay), an indirect title (is mysterious about the topic), or a combination of both.
- Avoid titles that are too broad to truly clarify, comment on, or create interest about the subject of **your** particular essay/argument.